



STATE ADMINISTRATION

Exhibit No. 5
Date 1-22-07
Bill No. SB-260

**Written Comments to State Administration Committee
SB 260**

Madam Chair and members of the committee,

After organizing protests and counter-events in response to a U.S. House of Representatives 'field hearing' held in Hamilton on immigration last summer, we at the **Bitterroot Human Rights Alliance** came to understand that there is much confusion and lack of facts on the Immigration discussion here in Montana, even amongst caring people who want to do the right thing. Being as how both of our senators are sitting on this committee and that the U.S. House chose Hamilton as the location for one of only 19 'field hearings' held throughout the country, we feel obligated to respond to this bill and feel hopeful that we can give reasonable members of this committee some food for thought as they consider this, as well as any other, anti-immigration bill coming your way.

We protested the federal 'field hearing' in Hamilton because it was so obviously part of an orchestrated effort by the House leadership to aid right-wing anti-immigrant congressmen and Senators facing close elections in states where they thought energizing bigotry would help. The House Immigration Bill was draconian. It would have criminalized millions of people—not just undocumented workers but those who were judged to be 'helping' them—including church organizations. It would also have authorized not only the truly silly and intrusive fence along the Mexican border but an additional study on whether our northern border (Montana) needs the same. Of note to this committee is that, because so many of us have allowed ourselves to be manipulated through misinformation into being fearful of immigrants, the feds have now allocated funds to study the feasibility of installing a high-tech, high-priced, big-brother presence in some of Montana's wildest places that we normally equate with such high-value commodities as Solitude and Independence. This is not only weird, in that it's brought to us by the same folks who say they want to limit government, but it's also not what the vast majority of Montanans really want handed down to them from their leaders.

Where's the problem this bill supposedly addresses? What elections were, or are in danger of being skewed by these human beings we so dismissively label 'aliens'? There are 6 requirements in the current law for people to vote. If it's so important to criminalize one group, how about the others? Shouldn't we consider throwing a 17-yr-old in jail for trying to vote? How about an out-of-stater? Those Idahoans can be a pretty sneaky bunch.

It election-integrity is really the focus here, isn't it just as fitting for this committee to consider this: that anomalies such as SB 260 are fueled by a knee-jerk form of fearmongering that panders to a reactionary voter-base which never amounts to more than 20% or so but actually does skew elections if our leaders, our media, and we the people don't stand up to them with reasoned discourse? There's no need for SB 260, but there's great need for our elected officials to be thoughtfully questioning the intent or misinformed philosophy behind such efforts, because when we're talking 'Immigration' here in Montana, it's too easy to fall back into an 'us versus 'them' mentality. Please remember that, when we're doing the easy talk of criminalizing these folks, we're talking about allowing our national leaders to use these kinds of cumulative fear tactics to justify the hi-tech government surveillance of all of us in our forests and mountains among other things. It's not 'us versus 'them' on those terms. It's 'us versus us'.

Respectfully submitted,
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Coordinator/ Bitterroot Human Rights Alliance
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